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Shultz Promises Not to Divert CIA Funds to Contras

By NORMAN KEMPSTER and DOYLE McMANUS, Times Staff Writers

WASHINGTON — Secretary of State George P. Shultz promised Congress on Tuesday that the Reagan Administration will not use special CIA funds to expand its proposed \$100 million in aid for Nicaraguan rebels, but Democrats said they still fear that the program will grow.

Shultz, responding to Democrats' questions on the eve of a debate on the issue on the House floor, sent a letter to Intelligence Committee Chairman Lee H. Hamilton (D-Ind.) formally renouncing any use of the CIA's secret "contingency reserve" to help the contras, aides said.

The chamber is scheduled to vote on the issue Thursday, and both Republicans and Democrats are predicting a close result.

"The Administration wishes to make clear that it will not augment the President's request through the use of CIA or other funds that have not been approved by Congress for this purpose," State Department spokesman Charles Redman said.

Lack of Restrictions

Hamilton and other members of the Intelligence Committee had demanded such a promise after Administration officials said that their proposal would remove all restrictions on CIA activities in the area.

The Administration now believes that the CIA is prohibited from spending secret funds on the contras for the rest of the current fiscal year, which ends Sept. 30, officials said. After that, no legal prohibition will apply, they said, adding however that Shultz has promised that no additional money will be spent without congressional approval.

The Administration proposal would also lift existing restrictions on CIA participation in administering the aid and advising the contras, although officials said they would seek the approval of Congress intelligence committees for any such role.

Several Democrats still said, however, that they fear the program will end up costing more than

the original request.

"The \$100 million is only a base line," said an aide to Rep. Michael D. Barnes (D-Md.), chairman of the House Foreign Affairs subcommittee on Latin America. "There are a lot of ways to spend money."

Assistant Secretary of State Elliott Abrams told another congressional panel that the Administration plans to send "three or four dozen" military trainers to Central America to instruct the contras, if aid is approved.

In another development, a Gallup poll released Tuesday showed that 52% of the U.S. public believes that Congress should reject the \$100-million aid plan, with 35% in favor of approval.

Administration spokesmen had said Monday that a U.S.-commissioned poll showed that Central Americans support the contras, but they refused again Tuesday to release the full results.

One official said that the key question in the Central American poll was asked only of persons with at least a seventh-grade education who had previously heard that the rebels were receiving outside support.

He said the question was: "What is your opinion about assistance given to contra forces in Nicaragua? Do you approve strongly? Approve somewhat? Disapprove somewhat? Disapprove strongly? Or don't know enough to have an opinion?"

The official said, however, that the question was preceded by an open-ended one asking how much the respondent had heard about aid to the contras. If the respondent said he or she had heard nothing about the program, the pollster skipped the approve-disapprove question.

The White House and State Department continued to refuse to divulge the poll's wording. Nevertheless, an official of the U.S. Information Agency, which commissioned the poll, readily answered a reporter's questions.

He confirmed the approve-disapprove results issued Monday: In Costa Rica 69% approve, 24% disapprove; in Honduras 55% approve and 25% disapprove; in Guatemala 54% approve and 22% disapprove, and in El Salvador 52% approve and 19% disapprove.

The official said that the most recent poll was taken only in Costa Rica and Honduras. It showed an increase in support for aid to the contras in those two countries: 76% approve and 22% disapprove in Costa Rica, and 73% approve and 17% disapprove in Honduras.

There was no explanation of why the White House chose not to publicize the February poll, which appeared to buttress the Administration's position.